

Part of L'Aquila Italian Capital of Culture 2026

Fabio Mauri. Gli anni dell'Aquila

Curated by Maurizio Cattelan and Marta Papini

26 September 2026 – 24 January 2027

MAXXI L'Aquila – Palazzo Ardinghelli

Performance: *Che cosa è il fascismo* | Saturday 26 September, at 11:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.

Istituto di Istruzione Superiore "Amedeo D'Aosta" – Via Acquasanta 5, entrance at the Via Giuseppe Mezzanotte car park, L'Aquila. [Booking link](#)

L'Aquila, 25 September 2026 – 'Fabio Mauri. Gli anni dell'Aquila', curated by **Maurizio Cattelan** and **Marta Papini**, is an exhibition organised by **L'Aquila City Council** and produced by **MAXXI**, and is one of the most eagerly awaited projects as part of L'Aquila's designation as **Italian Capital of Culture 2026**.

The exhibition pays tribute, on the centenary of his birth, to Fabio Mauri – an artist, writer and intellectual who was one of the most radical figures of the second half of the 20th century – and is programmed at MAXXI L'Aquila from 26 September 2026 to 24 January 2027.

The project takes its starting point from the **bond that Mauri forged with the city and its inhabitants** – from 1979 to 1999, he taught 'Aesthetics of Experimentation' at the Academy of Fine Arts – and explores some of the fundamental themes of his work: the **allure of ideologies**, the **mechanisms of propaganda**, the **power of images and their ability to influence individual and collective consciousness**.

Works, installations, photographs and performances thus constantly challenge the **relationship between representation and power**, calling into question the responsibility of both those who produce the images and those who view them. **The viewer is never placed in a position of neutrality**, but is called upon to confront the ambiguities, repressions and omissions of history.

This reflection, in a present marked by conflicts and ideological tensions, remains highly relevant and reaffirms **the critical force and civic value of Mauri's work**.

This tension is already foreshadowed by **the poster chosen by the curators**: an archive image showing the **monumental silhouette of an eagle standing out against a Nazi military parade**. Memory and politics overlap in a composition that links the iconography of power with the city's name, visually introducing some of the themes running through the exhibition.

The project extends beyond the walls of Palazzo Ardinghelli to involve the wider city of L'Aquila. To mark the opening, **on Saturday 26 September at 11.30 am and 5.30 pm, "*Che cosa è il fascismo. Festa in onore del generale Ernst von Hessel di passaggio per Roma*" (1971)** returns after almost thirty years – one of Mauri's most emblematic performances, produced in collaboration with the Academy of Fine Arts in L'Aquila and directed by Giancarlo Gentilucci. By reconstructing the fascist *Ludi Juveniles*, which the artist witnessed as a twelve-year-old in 1938, **the performance directly involves the audience**, bridging the gap between observer and what is staged.

Leaving a **permanent mark on the city, however, are three manhole covers selected by Maurizio Cattelan and Marta Papini** – interventions destined to become part of L'Aquila's urban landscape beyond the duration of the exhibition.

*"Fabio Mauri has forged a deep and lasting relationship with L'Aquila, built on teaching, research and engagement with the city," says **Pierluigi Biondi, Mayor of L'Aquila**. "This exhibition now brings that relationship to life in a vibrant and shared form, thanks to the exhibition layout, but also thanks to the performance involving the Academy's students, and to the legacy of the manhole covers that carry the value of this exhibition into the urban landscape.*

*"With this exhibition, MAXXI L'Aquila once again confirms itself as a venue capable of promoting a profound reinterpretation of the past in the light of the present," says **Maria Emanuela Bruni, President of the Fondazione MAXXI**. "Celebrating an artist does not mean erecting a static monument, but rather circulating an idea once more. Fabio Mauri's work speaks with equal intensity to those familiar with his career and to those encountering his art for the first time, continuing to provoke reflection and surprise even today."*

*"Although conceived between forty and fifty years ago, the works on display tackle highly topical issues: Europe's ambiguous and borderline position, the relationship between art and politics, memory and the repression of the atrocities of war, and the persuasive and fatal allure of fascist ideology. Mauri's exploration of the image and the screen as instruments of power and persuasion is now more necessary than ever, as it questions our responsibility and complicity – as individuals and as a society – with the ideologies of yesterday and today," state the curators **Maurizio Cattelan and Marta Papini**.*

The exhibition itinerary and the performances

At the heart of the exhibition itinerary lies **'Io sono un ariano'**, published in 2009 by Edizioni VOLUME!, the artist's latest publishing project, treated by the curators as a sort of autobiographical score – a diary composed solely of images that creates a timeline recounting the life and works of Fabio Mauri. Around this timeline, the arrangement of the works does not follow a chronological or philological order, but unfolds as a sequence of images constructed through visual associations, resonances and contrasts.

The exhibition opens with the installation **'La resa'** (2002) and continues with a selection of works representative of Mauri's output, including **'Muro d'Europa / La barca'** (1979), **'Che cosa è la filosofia. Heidegger e la questione tedesca. Concerto da tavolo'** (1989), which comprises fifteen lithographs from **'Manipolazione di cultura'** (1976), and the monochrome screens and the bronze sculpture depicting Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Germany's Minister of Propaganda, from **'Entartete Kunst'** (1985). An immersive section recreates the installation of the **"Arierwiese"** series (1995), where 'Aryan'-labelled furniture and everyday objects reveal the absurdity of the ideological and racial construct.

The exhibition continues with **'Piccolo Cinema'** (2007), **'Picnic'** or **'Il buon soldato'** (1998), **'Studenti'** (1992) – a work closely linked to the artist's teaching activities – and the sculpture **'Piccola atomica'** (1998). The exhibition is enriched by the works on paper never shown during the artist's lifetime, **'Apocalisse'** and **'Scorticati'**, as well as the environmental installation **'Interno/Esterno'** (1990).

The **performative dimension**, central to Mauri's practice, runs through the project with two works: **'Che cosa è il fascismo. Festa in onore del generale Ernst von Hüssel di passaggio per Roma'** (1971) – evoked in the exhibition by a looped audio piece (1973) – and **'Che cosa è la filosofia. Heidegger e la questione tedesca. Concerto da tavolo'** (1989), last presented in 2012 at dOCUMENTA (13) and due to be restaged at MAXXI L'Aquila in December. The artist described his performances as 'spiritual exercises': immersions in Evil to experience a bit more of the burning of hell, where the audience does not merely watch but participates.

Three manhole covers for L'Aquila, Italian Capital of Culture

Extending the exhibition's presence into the urban environment, **Maurizio Cattelan and Marta Papini choose three bronze manhole covers as a permanent legacy to the city**: a gesture that entrusts to the public space the **memory of L'Aquila as Italian Capital of Culture and of the exhibition dedicated to Fabio Mauri**, through the symbols of the eagle and the iconic rose window of the Collemaggio Basilica. Situated in **Piazza Duomo, Piazza Palazzo, and Via Verdi**, these installations transform an ordinary element of the urban landscape into an artistic presence designed to endure over time, creating another point of connection between the history of **Fabio Mauri**, that of L'Aquila, and the curatorial vision of Cattelan and Papini.

Fabio Mauri will also be the focus of a major retrospective in February 2027 at MAMbo – the Museum of Modern Art in Bologna, entitled 'Fabio Mauri. Convincimi della morte degli altri capisco solo la mia. Opere e azioni 1942-2009'.

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